

## Testimony of Joseph Shortt

### Governor's Proposed FY 23 Budget Adjustments H.B. No. 5037 (COMM) AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2023.

My name is Joseph Shortt and I'm a Southbury resident. I am testifying on behalf of Connecticut's Independent Living Centers. Thank you for your continued support for this cost-effective program, but I need you consider an increase in funding, so Connecticut's Independent Living Centers can meet the needs of its diverse communities.

I've been a quadriplegic since 2002, due to a spinal cord injury. At the time of my injury I had no idea what resources were available or what direction to turn for support. Thankfully, I received guidance from an Independent Living Center, so that I was able to learn to drive with adaptive equipment, live on my own, and go back to school to eventually earn a master's degree in Social Work. With their guidance I was able to regain my own independence so that I can give back to the community and help other individuals with disabilities.

I'm an Independent Living Advocate and Youth Transitional Counselor at Independence Northwest; which is one of the five Independent Living Centers in Connecticut. They offer essential services to children, adults, and elders with ALL types of disabilities and they are the first place to go to get accurate, unbiased information on all aspects of life related to living with a disability. As an Independent Living Advocate for over ten years, I am able to pass on the knowledge that I have acquired to individuals who are in the position I was once in. Individuals who don't know where to turn for assistance, who need peer counseling, and in many cases need an advocate.

There are five core services that each Independent Living Center provides; these include advocacy, peer mentoring, information & referrals, independent living skills training, and transition of people with disabilities from nursing homes or other institutions to home and community-based living, as well as the transition of youth with disabilities to higher education or employment. This includes Diversion Services that assist those who are at risk of entering an institutional setting; which saves the state a tremendous amount of money every year.

I have witnessed the reduction of services and programs offered to individuals with disabilities due to budget cuts, which have never been fully restored. Because of budget cuts, Centers had no choice but to reduce staffing and limit services; as well as drastically reduce service areas. Connecticut's five Independent Living Centers were established in 1987 with matching state and federal dollars at \$200,000 each yet 35 years later they are only receiving \$92,000 each. I am requesting a one-million-dollar funding increase so Connecticut Independent Living Centers can begin to restore services and make vital services available to individuals with a disability in all areas in Connecticut.

Thank you for your valuable time, consideration and on-going support.

Sincerely,  
Joseph Shortt